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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [KINR](#) [IR](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: FORMER AMBASSADOR OUTLINES JORDAN'S RELATIONSHIP
WITH IRAN

Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Former Ambassador to Iran Bassem Al-Umush described the contours of the official relationship between Jordan and Iran during a September 1 meeting with PolOff. Jordan maintains a minimal diplomatic presence in Tehran to reflect the lack of substantive relations. Iran's efforts to expand economic ties in recent years have been rejected by a Jordanian government wary of political implications. While there is little business to conduct, Jordan and Iran maintain the relationship as a way to keep lines of communication open. End Summary.

A Foot In The Door

¶2. (C) Umush said that Jordanian interests in Iran are minimal. When he was Ambassador (2000-2001), there were only 44 Jordanians residing in Iran, most of whom were married to Iranians and required little in the way of consular services. Due to the paucity of official business between Jordan and Iran, the Jordanian Ambassador in Tehran is largely a ceremonial post that is usually filled by a political appointee.

¶3. (S/NF) Trade is miniscule, and Umush noted that Jordan has rejected several Iranian proposals in recent years that would have expanded economic ties. Underlying suspicion that Iran was planning to use business and transport links to create a political foothold in Jordan effectively scuttled a series of deals. Iran reportedly offered to finance the construction of an airport for pilgrims to a Shiite shrine in the rural town of Karak. While not directly shutting the door on Iran's proposal, Jordanian officials indicated that they would apply strict security measures for incoming visitors to such an airport, and the idea was quietly dropped. Iran also reportedly voiced interest in submitting a tender for the Disi project, which will convey aquifer water from southern Jordan to Amman. When it emerged that Iran was proposing that the pipeline be constructed entirely by Iranian workers, Jordanian officials raised objections which effectively ended the tender.

¶4. (C) Umush said that Jordan remains concerned about Iranian political influence in Jordan, and keeps a close eye on the Iranian Embassy's activities in Amman. He estimated that there are around 2,000 Shiites in Jordan, and claimed that many of them receive financial assistance from the Iranian Embassy. (Note: Jordan's State Security Court recently started a trial of six Shiites for allegedly proselytizing and "inciting sectarianism." End Note.)

Maintaining The Status Quo

¶5. (C) Regardless of the political distance which characterizes ties between Jordan and Iran, Umush said that the relationship is valued by both countries as a way to keep

the door open for possible future cooperation. He predicted that Jordan and Iran would continue the status quo of maintaining open lines of communication and avoiding controversy for the foreseeable future. While Iran is interested in expanding its relationship with Jordan, officials in Amman are cool to the idea. Umush predicted that substantive ties may only come when a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict allows for a regional re-assessment of Iran's political role.

Bio Note

¶6. (SBU) Umush started his political career in the Muslim Brotherhood, which he was a member of for 30 years. He was elected to parliament in 1989 as an Islamic Action Front representative from Zarqa. In 1997 he broke with the Muslim Brotherhood over its decision to boycott the parliamentary elections that year. Likely as a reward for doing so, Umush subsequently appointed Minister of Administrative Development and Minister of Parliamentary Affairs. He served as Jordan's Ambassador to Iran from 2000 to 2001. In 2007, Umush was appointed as the director of the Islamic Center Society following a government takeover of the organization (septel).

Umush resigned from the position just seven months later after a dispute over government interference. He is currently a professor at Zarqa Private University, another institution which was formerly controlled by the Muslim Brotherhood. He is also director of the Jordanian Political Observatory, a small think tank. Umush hails from the Beni Hassan tribe. He is married and has two college age sons. Beecroft